Donkey Kong (video game)

Donkey Kong (Japanese: ドンキーコング Hepburn: *Donkī Kongu*) is an arcade game released by Nintendo in 1981. An early example of the platform game genre, the gameplay focuses on maneuvering the main character across a series of platforms while dodging and jumping over obstacles. In the game, Mario (originally named Mr. Video and then Jumpman) must rescue a damsel in distress named Pauline (originally named Lady), from a giant ape named Donkey Kong. The hero and ape later became two of Nintendo's most popular and recognizable characters. *Donkey Kong* is one of the most important games from the golden age of arcade video games as well as one of the most popular arcade games of all time.

The game was the latest in a series of efforts by Nintendo to break into the North American market. Hiroshi Yamauchi, Nintendo's president at the time, assigned the project to a first-time video game designer named Shigeru Miyamoto. Drawing from a wide range of inspirations, including *Popeye*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *King Kong*, Miyamoto developed the scenario and designed the game alongside Nintendo's chief engineer, Gunpei Yokoi. The two men broke new ground by using graphics as a means of characterization, including cutscenes to advance the game's plot, and integrating multiple stages into the gameplay.

Although Nintendo's American staff was initially apprehensive, *Donkey Kong* succeeded commercially and critically in North America and Japan. Nintendo licensed the game to Coleco, who developed home console versions for numerous platforms. Other companies cloned Nintendo's hit and avoided royalties altogether. Miyamoto's characters appeared on cereal boxes, television cartoons, and dozens of other places. A lawsuit brought on by Universal City Studios (which later would drop "City"), alleging *Donkey Kong* violated their trademark of *King Kong*, ultimately failed. The success of *Donkey Kong* and Nintendo's victory in the courtroom helped to position the company for video game market dominance from its release in 1981 until the late 1990s (1996–1999).

Contents

Donkey Kong	
Donkey Kong arcade at the QuakeCon 2005.png	
Small model based on original arcade cabinet	
Developer(s)	Nintendo Research & Development 1 Ikegami Tsushinki
Publisher(s)	Nintendo
Director(s)	Shigeru Miyamoto
Producer(s)	Gunpei Yokoi
Designer(s)	Shigeru Miyamoto Gunpei Yokoi
Composer(s)	Yukio Kaneoka
Series	*Donkey Kong* *Mario*
Platform(s)	Arcade
Release	July 9, 1981
Genre(s)	Platformer
Mode(s)	Single-player
Cabinet	Upright, mini, and

	cocktail
Arcade system	*Radar Scope*
CPU	Z80 @ 3.072 MHz
Sound	i8035
Display	Raster monitor (vertical), 224×256 resolution, 256 out of 768 colors

Gameplay

Following 1980's *Space Panic*, *Donkey Kong* is one of the earliest examples of the platform game genre[5]:94[6] even prior to the term being coined; the US gaming press used *climbing game* for games with platforms and ladders.[7] As the first platform game to feature jumping, *Donkey Kong* requires the player to jump between gaps and over obstacles or approaching enemies, setting the template for the future of the platform genre.[8] With its four unique stages,*Donkey Kong* was the most complex arcade game at the time of its release, and one of the first arcade games to feature multiple stages, following 1980's *Phoenix* and 1981's *Gorf* and *Scramble*.:66[9]

Gameplay of *Donkey Kong* in the first stage, with Mario holding a hammer.

Competitive video gamers and referees stress the game's high level of difficulty compared to other classic arcade games. Winning the game requires patience and the ability to accurately time Mario's ascent.[10]:82 In addition to presenting the goal of saving Pauline, the game also gives the player a score. Points are awarded for the following: leaping over obstacles; destroying objects with a hammer power-up; collecting items such as hats, parasols, and purses (presumably belonging to Pauline); removing rivets from platforms; and completing each stage (determined by a steadily decreasing bonus counter). The player typically receives three lives with a bonus awarded for the first 7,000 points, although this can be modified via the game's built in DIP switches. One life is lost whenever Mario touches Donkey Kong or any enemy object, falls too far through a gap or off the end of a platform, or lets the bonus counter reach zero.

The game is divided into four different single-screen stages. Each represents 25 meters of the structure Donkey Kong has climbed, one stage being 25 meters higher than the previous. The final stage occurs at 100 meters. Stage one involves Mario scaling a construction site made of crooked girders and ladders while jumping over or hammering barrels and oil drums tossed by Donkey Kong. Stage two involves climbing a five-story structure of conveyor belts, each of which transport cement pans. The third stage involves the player riding elevators while avoiding bouncing springs. The fourth and final stage requires Mario to remove eight rivets from the platforms supporting Donkey Kong; removing the final rivet causes Donkey Kong to fall and the hero to be reunited with Pauline.[11] These four stages combine to form a level.
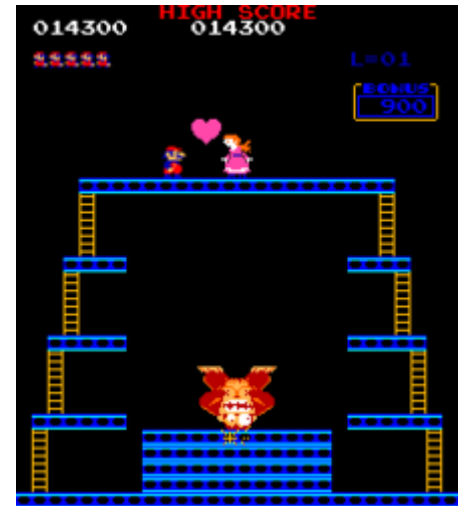
Upon completion of the fourth stage, the level then increments, and the game repeats the stages with progressive difficulty. For example, Donkey Kong begins to hurl barrels faster and sometimes diagonally, and fireballs speed up. The victory music alternates between levels 1 and 2. The fourth level, however, consists of 5 stages with the final stage at 125 meters. The 22nd level is colloquially known as the kill screen, due to an error in the game's programming that kills Mario after a few seconds, effectively ending the game.[11]

Plot

Donkey Kong is considered to be the earliest video game with a storyline that visually unfolds on screen.[8] The eponymous Donkey Kong character is the game's *de facto* villain. The hero is a carpenter originally unnamed in the Japanese arcade release, later named Jumpman and then Mario.[12] Donkey Kong kidnaps Mario's girlfriend, originally known as Lady, but later renamed Pauline. The player must take the role of Mario and rescue her. This is the first occurrence of the damsel in distress scenario that would provide the template for countless video games to come.[10]:82

The game uses graphics and animation as vehicles of characterization. Donkey Kong smirks upon Mario's demise. Pauline has a pink dress and long hair,[13]:19–20 and a speech balloon crying "HELP!" appears frequently beside her. Mario, depicted in red overalls and a red cap, is an everyman character, a type common in Japan. Graphical limitations and the low pixel resolution of the small sprites prompted his design: drawing a mouth with such few pixels is infeasible, so the character was given a mustache;[14]:37 the programmers could not animate hair, so he got a cap; and to make his arm movements visible, he needed colored overalls.[10]:238 The artwork used for the cabinets and promotional materials make these cartoon-like character designs even more explicit. Pauline, for example, is depicted to be disheveled (like *King Kong*'s Fay Wray) in a torn dress and stiletto heels.[13]:19–20

Donkey Kong is the first example of a complete narrative told in video game form, and like 1980's *Pac-Man*, it employs cutscenes to advance its plot. The game opens with the gorilla climbing a pair of ladders to the top of a construction site. He sets Pauline down and stomps his feet, causing the steel beams to change shape. He then moves to his final perch and sneers. A melody then plays, and the level (or stage) starts. This brief animation sets the scene and adds background to the gameplay, a first for video games. Upon reaching the end of the stage, another cutscene begins. A heart appears between Mario and Pauline, but Donkey Kong grabs the woman and climbs higher, causing the heart to break. The narrative concludes when Mario reaches the end of the rivet stage. He and Pauline are reunited, and a short intermission plays.[14]:40–42 The gameplay then loops from the beginning at a higher level of difficulty, without any formal ending.

On the final screen of each level, Mario and Pauline are reunited.

Development

As of late 1980 to early 1981, Nintendo's efforts to expand to North America had failed, culminating with the attempted export of the otherwise successful *Radar Scope*. They were left with a large number of unsold *Radar Scope* machines, so company president Hiroshi Yamauchi thought of simply converting them into something new. He approached a young industrial designer named Shigeru Miyamoto, who had been working for Nintendo since 1977, to see if he could design such a replacement. Miyamoto said that he could.[15]:157 Yamauchi appointed Nintendo's head engineer, Gunpei Yokoi, to supervise the project.[15]:158 Nintendo's budget for the development of the game was $100,000.[16] Some sources also claim that Ikegami Tsushinki was involved in some of the development.[17][18] They played no role in the game's creation or concept, but were hired to provide "mechanical programming assistance to fix the software created by Nintendo".[16]

At the time, Nintendo was also pursuing a license to make a game based on the *Popeye* comic strip. When this license attempt failed, Nintendo took the opportunity to create new characters that could then be marketed and used in later games.[10]:238[19] Miyamoto came up with many characters and plot concepts, but he eventually settled on a love triangle between a gorilla, a carpenter, and a girlfriend that mirrors the rivalry between Bluto and Popeye for Olive Oyl.[14]:39 Bluto became an ape, which Miyamoto said was "nothing too evil or repulsive".[20]:47 He would be the pet of the main character, "a funny, hang-loose kind of guy."[20]:47 Miyamoto has also named "Beauty and the Beast" and the 1933 film *King Kong* as influences.[14]:36 Although its origin as a comic strip license played a major part, *Donkey Kong* marked the first time that the storyline for a video game preceded the game's programming rather than simply being appended as an afterthought.[14]:38 Unrelated *Popeye* games would eventually be released by Nintendo for the Game & Watch the following month, and for the arcades in 1982.

Yamauchi wanted primarily to target the North American market, so he mandated that the game be given an English title, though many of their games to this point had English titles anyway. Miyamoto decided to name the game for the ape, whom he felt was the strongest character.[14]:39 The story of how Miyamoto came up with the name "Donkey Kong" varies. A false urban myth says that the name was originally meant to be "Monkey Kong", but was misspelled or misinterpreted due to a blurred fax or bad telephone connection.[21] Another, more credible story claims Miyamoto looked in a Japanese-English dictionary for something that would mean "stubborn gorilla",[15] or that "Donkey" was meant to convey "silly" or "stubborn"; "Kong" was common Japanese slang for
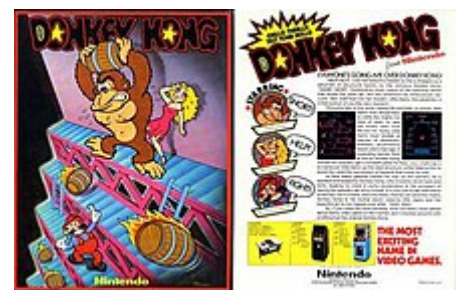
"gorilla".[10]:238 A rival claim is that he worked with Nintendo's export manager to come up with the title, and that "Donkey" was meant to represent "stupid and goofy".[20]:48–49 In the end, Miyamoto stated that he thought the name would convey the thought of a "stupid ape".[22]

Miyamoto himself had high hopes for his new project. He lacked the technical skills to program it alone, so instead came up with concepts and consulted technicians to see if they were possible. He wanted to make the characters different sizes, move in different manners and react in various ways. Yokoi thought Miyamoto's original design was too complex,[20]:47–48 though he had some difficult suggestions himself, such as using see-saws to catapult the hero across the screen (eventually found too hard to program, though a similar concept would appear in the aforementioned *Popeye* arcade game). Miyamoto then thought of using sloped platforms, barrels and ladders. When he specified that the game would have multiple stages, the four-man programming team complained that he was essentially asking them to make the game repeatedly.[14]:38–39 Nevertheless, they followed Miyamoto's design, creating a total of approximately 20 kilobytes of content.[15]:530 Yukio Kaneoka composed a simple soundtrack to serve as background music for the levels and story events.[23][24]

The circuit board of *Radar Scope* was restructured for *Donkey Kong*. The *Radar Scope* hardware, originally inspired by the Namco Galaxian hardware, was designed for a large number of enemies moving around at high speeds, which *Donkey Kong* did not require, so the development team removed unnecessary functions and reduced the scale of the circuit board.[25] While the gameplay and graphics were reworked for updated ROM chips, the existing CPU, sound hardware and monitor were left intact.[26] The character set, scoreboard, upper HUD display and font are almost identical to *Radar Scope*, with palette differences.[27] The *Donkey Kong* hardware had the memory capacity for displaying 128 foreground sprites at 16x16 pixels each and 256 background tiles at 8x8 pixels each. Mario and all moving objects used single sprites, the taller Pauline used two sprites, and the larger Donkey Kong used six sprites.[28]

Hiroshi Yamauchi thought the game was going to sell well and called Minoru Arakawa, head of Nintendo's operations in the US, to tell him. Nintendo's American distributors, Ron Judy and Al Stone, brought Arakawa to a lawyer named Howard Lincoln to secure a trademark.[15]:159

The game was sent to Nintendo of America for testing. The sales manager disliked it for being too different from the maze and shooter games common at the time,[20]:49 and Judy and Lincoln expressed reservations over the strange title. Still, Arakawa adamantly believed that it would be big.[15]:159 American staff began translating the storyline for the cabinet art and naming the characters. They chose "Pauline" for the Lady, after Polly James, wife of Nintendo's Redmond, Washington, warehouse manager, Don James.[14]:200 The name of "Jumpman", a name originally chosen for its similarity to the popular brands *Walkman* and *Pac-Man*,[14]:34–42 was eventually changed to "Mario" in likeness of Mario Segale, the landlord of the original office space of Nintendo of America.[14]:42[20]:109 These character names were printed on the American cabinet art and used in promotional materials. *Donkey Kong* was ready for release.[14]:212

North American *Donkey Kong* promotional flier from 1981, showing Mario, Donkey Kong, and Pauline.

Stone and Judy convinced the managers of two bars in Seattle, Washington, to set up *Donkey Kong* machines. The managers initially showed reluctance, but when they saw sales of $30 a day—or 120 plays—for a week straight, they requested more units.[9]:68 In their Redmond headquarters, a skeleton crew composed of Arakawa, his wife Yoko, James, Judy, Phillips and Stone set about gutting 2,000 surplus *Radar Scope* machines and converting them with *Donkey Kong* motherboards and power supplies from Japan.[20]:110 The game officially went on sale in July 1981.[15]:211 Actor Harris Shore[29] created the first live-action Mario in the television commercials[30][31] for Colecovision's hand-held *Donkey Kong* and *Donkey Kong, Junior* video games.

Reception

In his 1982 book *Video Invaders*, Steve Bloom described *Donkey Kong* as another bizarre cartoon game, courtesy of Japan".[14]:5 *Donkey Kong* was, however, extremely popular in the United States and Canada. The game's initial 2,000 units sold, and more orders were made. Arakawa began manufacturing the electronic

components in Redmond because waiting for shipments from Japan was taking too long.[15]:160 By October, *Donkey Kong* was selling 4,000 units a month, and by late June 1982, Nintendo had sold 60,000 *Donkey Kong* machines overall and earned $180 million.[15]:211 Judy and Stone, who worked on straight commission, became millionaires.[15]:160 Arakawa used Nintendo's profits to buy 27 acres (11 ha) of land in Redmond in July 1982.[20]:113 Nintendo earned another $100 million on the game in its second year of release,[20]:111 totaling $280 million[33] (equivalent to $755 million in 2018).[34] It remained Nintendo's top seller into summer 1983.[15]:284 *Donkey Kong* also sold steadily in Japan.[14]:46 *Electronic Games* speculated in June 1983 that the game's home versions contributed to the arcade version's extended popularity, compared to the four to six months that the average game lasted.[35]

In January 1983, the 1982 Arcade Awards gave it the Best Single-player video game award and the Certificate of Merit as runner-up for Coin-Op Game of the Year.[36] Ed Driscoll reviewed the Atari VCS version of *Donkey Kong* in *The Space Gamer* No. 59.[37] Edwards commented that "The faults really outweigh the plusses, especially if you've got '*Donkey Kong* Fever'. For the addicted, your cure lies elsewhere. Still, if you just play the game occasionally, or never, you may like this cartridge. However, play the store's copy, or try a friend's, before you buy."[37] In September 1982, *Arcade Express* reviewed the ColecoVision port and scored it 9 out of 10.[38] *Creative Computing Video & Arcade Games* in 1983 stated that "Coleco did a fabulous job" with *Donkey Kong*, the best of the console's first five games and "the most faithful adaptation of the original video game I have seen".[39] The magazine's Danny Goodman stated that of Coleco's three console versions, the one for the ColecoVision was the best, "followed surprisingly by the Atari and Intellivision, in that order".[40] *Computer and Video Games* reviewed the ColecoVision port in its September 1984 issue and scored it 4 out of 4 in all four categories of Action, Graphics, Addiction and Theme.[41]

Licensing and ports

By late June 1982, *Donkey Kong*'s success had prompted more than 50 parties in the U.S. and Japan to license the game's characters.[15]:215 Mario and his simian nemesis appeared on cereal boxes, board games, pajamas, and manga. In 1983, the animation studio Ruby-Spears produced a *Donkey Kong* cartoon (as well as *Donkey Kong Jr.*) for the *Saturday Supercade* program on CBS. In the show, mystery crime-solving plots in the mode of *Scooby-Doo* are framed around the premise of Mario and Pauline chasing Donkey Kong (voiced by Soupy Sales), who has escaped from the circus. The show lasted two seasons.

Makers of video game consoles were also interested. Taito offered a considerable sum to buy all rights to *Donkey Kong*, but Nintendo turned them down after three days of discussion within the company.[20] Rivals Coleco and Atari approached Nintendo in Japan and the United States respectively. In the end, Yamauchi granted Coleco exclusive console and tabletop rights to *Donkey Kong* because he felt that "It [was] the hungriest company".[20]:111 In addition, Arakawa felt that as a more established company in the US, Coleco could better handle marketing. In return, Nintendo would receive an undisclosed lump sum plus $1.40 per game cartridge sold and $1 per tabletop unit. On December 24, 1981, Howard Lincoln drafted the contract. He included language that Coleco would be held liable for anything on the game cartridge, an unusual clause for a licensing agreement.[15]:208–209 Arakawa signed the document the next day, and, on February 1, 1982, Yamauchi persuaded the Coleco representative in Japan to sign without running the document by the company's lawyers.[20]:112

Coleco did not offer the game cartridge stand-alone; instead, they bundled it with their ColecoVision, which went on sale in August 1982. Six months later, Coleco offered Atari 2600 and Intellivision versions, too. Notably, they did not port it to the Atari 5200, a system comparable to their own (as opposed to the less powerful 2600 and Intellivision). Coleco's sales doubled to $500 million and their earnings quadrupled to $40 million.[15]:210 Coleco's console versions of *Donkey Kong* sold six million cartridges in total, grossing over $153 million,[a] and earning Nintendo over $5 million in royalties.[42] Coleco also released stand-alone Mini-Arcade tabletop versions of *Donkey Kong*, which, along with *Pac-Man*, *Galaxian*, and *Frogger*, sold three million units combined.[43] Meanwhile, Atari got the license for computer versions of *Donkey Kong* and released it for the Atari 400/800. When Coleco unveiled

the Adam Computer, running a port of *Donkey Kong* at the 1983 Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago, Illinois, Atari protested that it was in violation of the licensing agreement. Yamauchi demanded that Arnold Greenberg, Coleco's president, shelve his Adam port. This version of the game was cartridge-based, and thus not a violation of Nintendo's license with Atari; still, Greenberg complied. Ray Kassar of Atari was fired the next month, and the home PC version of *Donkey Kong* fell through.[15]:283–285

In 1983, Atari released several computer versions under the Atarisoft label. All of the computer ports had the cement factory level, while most of the console versions did not. None of the home versions of Donkey Kong had all of the intermissions or animations from the arcade game. Some have Donkey Kong on the left side of the screen in the barrel level (like he is in the arcade game) and others have him on the right side.

Miyamoto created a greatly simplified version for the Game & Watch multiscreen. Other ports include the Apple II, Atari 7800, Intellivision, Commodore VIC-20, Famicom Disk System, IBM PC booter, ZX Spectrum, Amstrad CPC, MSX, Atari 8-bit family and Mini-Arcade versions. Two separate and distinct ports were developed for the Commodore 64 - the first was published by Atarisoft in 1983, and the second by Ocean Software in 1986.

The game was ported to Nintendo's Family Computer (Famicom) console in 1983 as one of the system's three launch games;[44] the same version was an early game for the Famicom's North American version, the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES). However, the cement factory level is not included, nor are most of the cutscenes since Nintendo did not have large enough cartridge ROMs available in the beginning. This port includes a new song composed by Yukio Kaneoka for the title screen;[23] an

Game & Watch Donkey Kong

arrangement of the tune appears in *Donkey Kong Country* for the Super Nintendo Entertainment System. Both *Donkey Kong* and its sequel, *Donkey Kong Jr.*, are included in the 1988 NES compilation *Donkey Kong Classics*. The NES version was re-released as an unlockable game in *Animal Crossing* for the GameCube and as an item for purchase on the Virtual Console for the Wii,[45] Wii U and Nintendo 3DS. The Wii U version is also the last game that was released to celebrate the 30-year anniversary of the Japanese version of the NES, the Famicom. The original arcade version of the game appears in the Nintendo 64 game *Donkey Kong 64*. Nintendo released the NES version on the e-Reader and for the Game Boy Advance *Classic NES* series in 2002 and 2004, respectively. The Famicom version of the game sold 840,000 units in Japan.[46]

Donkey Kong: Original Edition is a port based on the NES version that reinstates the cement factory stage and includes some intermission animations absent from the original NES version, which has only ever been released on the Virtual Console. It was preinstalled on 25th Anniversary PAL region red Wii systems,[47] which were first released in Europe on October 29, 2010.[48] In Japan, a download code for the game for Nintendo 3DS Virtual Console was sent to users who purchased *New Super Mario Bros. 2* or *Brain Age: Concentration Training* from the Nintendo eShop from July 28 to September 2, 2012.[49] In North America, a download code for the game for Nintendo 3DS Virtual Console was sent to users who purchased one of five select 3DS games on the Nintendo eShop and registered it on Club Nintendo from October 1, 2012 to January 6, 2013.[50][51] In Europe and Australia, it was released for purchase on the Nintendo 3DS eShop, being released on September 18, 2014 in Europe[52] and on September 19, 2014 in Australia.[53] The original arcade version was rereleased as part of the *Arcade Archives* series for Nintendo Switch on June 14, 2018.[54]
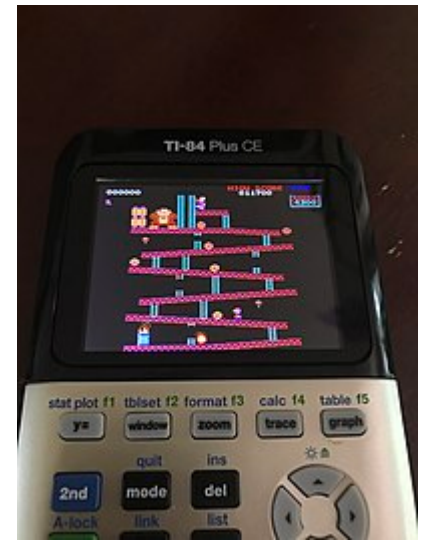
Clones

Crazy Kong was officially licensed from Nintendo and manufactured by Falcon for some non-US markets. Nevertheless, *Crazy Kong* machines found their way into some American arcades, often installed in cabinets marked as *Congorilla*. Nintendo was quick to take legal action against those distributing the game in the US.[55]:119 Bootleg copies of *Donkey Kong* also appeared in both North America and France under the *Crazy Kong*, *Konkey Kong* or *Donkey King* names. The 1982 *Logger* arcade game from Century Electronics is a direct clone of *Donkey Kong*, with a large bird standing in for the ape and rolling logs instead of barrels.[56]

In 1981, O. R. Rissman, president of Tiger Electronics, obtained a license to use the name *King Kong* from Universal City Studios. Under this title, Tiger created a handheld game with a scenario and gameplay based directly on Nintendo's creation.[15]:210–211

Many home computer clones directly borrowed the gorilla theme: *Killer Gorilla* (BBC Micro, 1983), *Killer Kong* (ZX Spectrum, 1983), *Crazy Kong 64* (Commodore 64, 1983), *Kongo Kong* (Commodore 64, 1983), *Donkey King* (TRS-80 Color Computer, 1983), and *Kong* (TI-99/4A, 1983). One of the first releases from Electronic Arts was *Hard Hat Mack* (Apple II, 1983), a three-stage game without an ape, but using the construction site setting from *Donkey Kong*. Other clones recast the game with different characters, such as *Cannonball Blitz* (Apple II, 1982), with a soldier and cannonballs replacing the ape and barrels, and the American Southwest-themed *Canyon Climber* (Atari 8-bit, 1982).[57]

Epyx's *Jumpman* (Atari 8-bit, 1983) reuses a prototypical name for the Mario character in *Donkey Kong*. A magazine ad for the game has the tagline "If you liked *Donkey Kong*, you'll love *JUMPMAN*!"[58] *Jumpman*, along with *Miner 2049er* (Atari 8-bit 1982) and *Mr. Robot and His Robot Factory* (Atari 8-bit, 1984), focuses on traversing all of the platforms in the level, or collecting scattered objects, instead of climbing to the top.

Example of a *Donkey Kong* clone for the TI-84 Plus CE series of calculators

There were so many games with multiple ladder and platforms stages by 1983 that *Electronic Games* described Nintendo's own *Popeye* game as "yet another variation of a theme that's become all too familiar since the success of *Donkey Kong*".[59] That year Sega released a *Donkey Kong* clone called *Congo Bongo* in arcades.[60] Although using isometric perspective, the structure and gameplay are similar.

Universal City Studios, Inc. v. Nintendo Co., Ltd.

In April 1982, Sid Sheinberg, a seasoned lawyer and president of MCA and Universal City Studios, learned of the game's success and suspected it might be a trademark infringement of Universal's own *King Kong*.[15]:211 On April 27, 1982, he met with Arnold Greenberg of Coleco and threatened to sue over Coleco's home version of *Donkey Kong*. Coleco agreed on May 3, 1982 to pay royalties to Universal of 3% of their *Donkey Kong*'s net sale price, worth about $4.6 million.[20]:121 Meanwhile, Sheinberg revoked Tiger's license to make its *King Kong* game, but O. R. Rissman refused to acknowledge Universal's claim to the trademark.[15]:214 When Universal threatened Nintendo, Howard Lincoln and Nintendo refused to cave. In preparation for the court battle ahead, Universal agreed to allow Tiger to continue producing its *King Kong* game as long as they distinguished it from *Donkey Kong*.[15]:215

Universal sued Nintendo on June 29, 1982 and announced its license with Coleco. The company sent cease and desist letters to Nintendo's licensees, all of which agreed to pay royalties to Universal except Milton Bradley and Ralston Purina.[61]:74–75 *Universal City Studios, Inc. v. Nintendo, Co., Ltd.* was heard in the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York by Judge Robert W. Sweet. Over seven days, Universal's counsel, the New York firm Townley & Updike, argued that the names *King Kong* and *Donkey Kong* were easily confused and that the plot of the game was an infringement on that of the films.[61]:74 Nintendo's counsel, John Kirby, countered that Universal had themselves argued in a previous case that *King Kong*'s scenario and characters were in the public domain. Judge Sweet ruled in Nintendo's favor, awarding the company Universal's profits from Tiger's game ($56,689.41), damages and attorney's fees.[15]:217

Universal appealed, trying to prove consumer confusion by presenting the results of a telephone survey and examples from print media where people had allegedly assumed a connection between the two Kongs.[55]:118 On October 4, 1984, however, the court upheld the previous verdict.[55]:112

Nintendo and its licensees filed counterclaims against Universal. On May 20, 1985, Judge Sweet awarded Nintendo $1.8 million for legal fees, lost revenues, and other expenses.[15]:218 However, he denied Nintendo's claim of damages from those licensees who had paid royalties to both Nintendo and Universal.[61]:72 Both parties appealed this judgment, but the verdict was upheld on July 15, 1986.[61]:77–78

Nintendo thanked John Kirby with the gift of a $30,000 sailboat named *Donkey Kong* and "exclusive worldwide rights to use the name for sailboats".[20]:126 A later Nintendo protagonist was named in Kirby's honor.[62] The court battle also taught Nintendo they could compete with larger entertainment industry companies.[20]:127

Legacy

In 1996 *Next Generation* listed the arcade, Atari 7800, and cancelled Coleco Adam versions as number 50 on their "Top 100 Games of All Time", commenting that even ignoring its massive historical significance, *Donkey Kong* stands as a great game due to its demanding challenges and graphics which manage to elegantly delineate an entire scenario on a single screen.[63] In February 2006, *Nintendo Power* rated it the 148th best game made on a Nintendo system.[64] Today, *Donkey Kong* is the fifth most popular arcade game among collectors.[65]

Donkey Kong was an inspiration for the 1983 platform game for home computers *Jumpman*, according to the game's creator.[66]

Super Smash Bros. Brawl features music from the game arranged by Hirokazu "Hip" Tanaka[24] and a stage called "75m", an almost exact replica of its *Donkey Kong* namesake.[67] While the stage contains her items, Pauline is missing from her perch at the top of the stage.[67]

In 2013, video game developer Mike Mika hacked the game to create a version where Pauline is the main character and rescues Mario. He created this version for his three-year-old daughter who wanted to play as a heroine.[68]

Sequels

Donkey Kong spawned the sequel *Donkey Kong Jr.* (1982) with the player controlling Donkey Kong's son in an attempt to save his father from the now-evil Mario. The 1983 spinoff *Mario Bros.* introduced Mario's brother Luigi in a single-screen cooperative game set in a sewer, and launched the *Mario* franchise. Also in 1983, *Donkey Kong 3* appeared in the form of a fixed shooter, with an exterminator ridding the ape—and insects—from a greenhouse.

Nintendo revived the *Donkey Kong* franchise in the 1990s for a series of platform games and spin-offs developed by Rare, beginning with *Donkey Kong Country* in 1994. In 2004, Nintendo released *Mario vs. Donkey Kong*, a sequel to the Game Boy's *Donkey Kong*, in which Mario must chase Donkey Kong to get back the stolen Mini-Mario toys. In the follow-up *Mario vs. Donkey Kong 2: March of the Minis*, Donkey Kong once again falls in love with Pauline and kidnaps her, and Mario uses the Mini-Mario toys to help him rescue her. *Donkey Kong Racing* for the GameCube was in development by Rare, but was canceled when Microsoft purchased the company. In 2004, Nintendo released the first of the *Donkey Konga* games, a rhythm-based game series that uses a special bongo controller. *Donkey Kong Jungle Beat* (2005) is a unique platform action game that uses the same bongo controller accessory. In 2007, *Donkey Kong Barrel Blast* was released for the Nintendo Wii. It was originally developed as a GameCube game and would have used the bongo controller, but it was delayed and released exclusively as a Wii game with no support for the bongo accessory.

Remakes and re-releases

A complete remake of the original arcade game on the Game Boy, named *Donkey Kong* or *Donkey Kong '94* contains levels from both the original *Donkey Kong* and *Donkey Kong Jr.* arcades. It starts with the same damsel-in-distress premise and four basic locations as the arcade game and then progresses to 97 additional puzzle-based levels. It is the first game to have built-in enhancement for the Super Game Boy accessory. The arcade version makes an appearance in *Donkey Kong 64* in the Frantic Factory level.

Donkey Kong appears as a game in the Wii U game *NES Remix*, which features multiple NES games and sometimes "remixes" them by presenting significantly modified versions of the games as challenges. One such challenge features Link from *The Legend of Zelda* traveling through the first screen to save Pauline. The difficulty is increased compared to the original *Donkey Kong* because Link cannot jump, as in *Zelda*.

In popular culture

Since its original release, *Donkey Kong*'s success has entrenched the game in American popular culture. In 1982, Buckner & Garcia and R. Cade and the Video Victims both recorded songs ("Do the Donkey Kong" and "Donkey Kong", respectively) based on the game. Artists like DJ Jazzy Jeff & the Fresh Prince and Trace Adkins referenced the game in songs. Episodes of television series such as *The Simpsons*, *Futurama*, *Crank Yankers* and *The Fairly OddParents* have also contained references to the game. Even today, sound effects from the Atari 2600 version often serve as generic video game sounds in films and television series. The phrase "It's on like Donkey Kong" has been used in various works of popular culture. In November 2010, Nintendo applied for a trademark on the phrase with the United States Patent and Trademark Office.[69]

Atari computer Easter egg

The Atari 8-bit computer port of *Donkey Kong* contains one of the longest-undiscovered *Easter eggs* in a video game.[70] Programmer Landon Dyer had his initials appear if the player died under certain conditions, then returned to the title screen. This remained undiscovered for 26 years until Dyer revealed it on his blog, stating "there's an easter egg, but it's totally not worth it, and I don't remember how to bring it up anyway."[71] The steps required to trigger it were later discovered by Don Hodges, who used an emulator and a debugger to trace through game's code.[72]

Competition

The first star player of Donkey Kong was Billy Mitchell, holding the world record for several decades. The 2007 motion picture documentary *The King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters* explores the world of competitive classic arcade gaming and tells the story of Steve Wiebe's quest to break Billy Mitchell's record.[73] In the beginning of the 2010s, Hank Chien successfully managed to break the record and pushed it to 1,138,600. After Chien held the record for four years, Robbie Lakeman was finally able to break the record.[74] The current Donkey Kong world record was set by Robbie Lakeman on February 2, 2018, with a score of 1,247,700.[76]

In 2018, Mitchell was stripped of his records by Twin Galaxies and banned from submitting new scores after Twin Galaxies concluded that Mitchell had used video game emulators to achieve several of his scores while claiming to have used an original arcade machine.[76] Twin Galaxies prohibits the use of emulators for high scores they publish because they allow undetectable cheating.[76]

Notes

a. "And we received from Coleco an agreement that they would pay us three percent of the net sales price [of all the *Donkey Kong* cartridges Coleco sold]." It turned out to be 6 million cartridges, which translated into $4.6 million.[20]:121

Wes Copeland at the Twin Galaxies Entertainment Expo in Banning, California

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Hank Chien at the Kong Off 3 tournament in Denver, Colorado

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External links

- *Donkey Kong* at the Killer List of Videogames
- Arcade-History.com entry for *Donkey Kong*
- Handheld version emulator for *Donkey Kong*